

D&D Fiction

Oroon Rising, Part 13

by Ed Greenwood



Chapter 13: The Doom You Deserve

Brethniir cursed, slowly and deliberately and with great eloquence. When words at last began to fail him, the soft hisses of Kadreth stepped into his pauses and took over the profane outpouring of fury...

...only to stop abruptly after one bitterly-snarled phrase, and conclude, "So our so-long-sought answer lies not in moldering scrolls after all, but in these sneering phantoms."

Brethniir's skull turned to regard the softly-glowing scrying spheres, and then back again. "We must scry as swiftly and diligently as we can, to uncover the magics the Oroon used to become what they are—and to possess and control mortals at will."

The Worm That Walks hissed agreement, and then held up a warning hand of coiling, restlessly-writhing. "There's something more we must do at the same time, an undertaking even more important than our prying: we must keep the Oroon from knowing they're being watched."

Brethniir's nod of agreement froze into slack-jawed staring as sudden and merry laughter burst from the nearest scrying-crystal.

The two archmages stared at the sphere in mute despair. Grinning at them from its suddenly-bright depths was the face of an elder Oroon, amusement dancing in his eyes.

So many magic-melted holes gaped in her armor that Jallana hardly felt more covered after she put it on than before. Yet somehow the familiar belts, boots, chafing buckles, and gently-skirling plates—some of them flapping loosely, the pieces they'd once mated with now melted away to nothing—reassured her even more than the comforting weight of the swords in her hands.



Then the Oroon smiled in her mind, like a cold and heavy cloud, and all Jallana's reassurance melted away.

Having let her dress herself freely, the mind riding hers had now clamped numbingly down again.

With no thought or movement of her own, Jallana found herself flying back up the shaft, blades in hand. All she could do was watch.

Darrance Oroon was in control as she soared up into the chamber of the long stone feasting table; Darrance Oroon was smiling broadly with her mouth as he swung her swords out and forward in the air in a great flourish to announce, “Once there were nine archmages, but now there are only two—for a very little while longer! I’m coming for you, Brethniir Boneface and Kadreth the Worm!”

Her last sentence rolled and thundered in the room as if echoing across vast vaulted distances, and ever-so-faintly, drifting back to her from afar, came the high cry of shattering crystal. With it, flashing in rainbow confusion around the stone walls, came a brief glimpse of a mirror-polished wooden table stretching away in a room smaller than hers, with a robed skeleton standing on one side of it, and a robed and cowed figure of countless tiny writhing worms on the other, both of them tracing spell-symbols in the air in frantic haste as they glared at her.

Darrance Oroon laughed through her mouth and hurled Jallana at them, plunging through their falling, fading rainbow shards right out of the chamber, to race like a bow-shot arrow into a dark and unfamiliar shaft, chasing her leveled swordpoints into waiting blackness.

Darrance Oroon rode her like a steed, his mind firm on hers, banking her sharply left and up, up into an unseen, unknown passage...

...where brightness promptly blossomed ahead of Jallana, crawling unpleasantly forward to stab at her with emerald bolts of fell magic.

Oroon laughed through her mouth again, and swung her up and back and away, deadly bolts arcing short below her. Through fresh tumbling rainbows, Jallana beheld the dimly-remembered countryside above Staelghast... high-endless rolling pits and sinkholes where shoulders of collapsed stone towers leaned and slumped, dark forests distant to right and left... and ahead, far away across the ruins, the dark, lone tower rising like a menacing sword, those two fell monster-wizards inside hurling spells in fear and hatred at her.

Then the rainbow shards were gone and Jallana was soaring up a dark and broken stair into great open, shattered chambers—chambers where the gloom was shattered by a sudden racing line of yellow-green explosions, flames lancing out in all directions like the rays of tiny suns and bringing down fresh showers of stone, the ceiling groaning and drawing nearer the floor... Oroon hurled her through an archway she hadn’t known was there, into higher-vaulted, untroubled darknesses, where she darted once more toward that distant tower.

A long way she sped, passing through three tall archways, from crumbling dark chamber to crumbling dark chamber, ere the air before her split open in hungry red fire like the maw of some impossibly-gigantic fire-spewing monster.

Inferno roared out at her. Through flames arcing bright and ravenous, Jallana twisted, looped, dived, darted, and raced on, laughing triumphantly.

Or rather, trapped inside herself, watching. Only watching.

Blue lighting fell like a crashing wall of crackling menace in front of her, rending ceiling and floor alike in

crumbling ruin.

For the first time, Jallana felt Darrance Oroon's thoughts—and they were a flare of astonishment. Around he swung her, so abruptly that the tip of one of her blades struck a long string of sparks along ceiling-stones, and down, side-slipping into oblivion as the wall leaned forward, towering over her, reaching out with tentative, stabbing bolts...

And she was out, into yet another unlit, forgotten chamber of dust and chill silence, and turning once more in the direction of that tower.

She got three rooms farther this time, before the wall in front of her exploded into stabbing, blinding-bright lances of spell-flame that transfixed hitherto-unseen bats and falling ceiling-tiles alike, reaching for her again and again.

Darrance only kept his unwilling hawk alive by hurling her to the floor like a stone, sparks awakening out of nowhere to race down her outstretched blades and become a spell-lance of her own that shattered the floor and let her plunge into darkness below.

It was another high-ceilinged chamber; her arrival sent tumbling tons of stone crashing down upon its unseen floor as she raced on again, the frantic spells of the last two archmages of the Nine clawing and howling somewhere overhead.

Pit after pit of a fallen, once-proud city passed by somewhere overhead as she darted on, heading for a place she could barely remember: Outside.

Someplace outside Staelghast.

Up a rubble-choked chimney she soared, into ruined rooms where sunlight reached faintly through the drifting dust, showing her cracked and leaning statues and—more spell-blasts! ...whirling toward her like spiked shields hurled on edge. Out of a faint shimmering of rainbows she could hear a hissed incantation, fear dragging the chanting voice higher.

Oroon was speaking through her mouth again, chanting spell-words of his own that made her skin creep and crawl and her innards slump in near-emptiness... and the air shimmer like sun-gold around her, rebuffing the whirling spell-wheels sharply away.

Through their trailing sparks, Jallana flew swiftly along a last passage toward the blinding-bright sun, her swords gleaming.

As she shot through the wind-whistling air, tattered armor clanging and flapping, Darrance Oroon made her laugh and snarl, "Kadareth! Brethniir! I'm coming for you! To bring you both the doom you deserve!"

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